«I pledge to act
to the best of my ability
to help make the Earth
a secure
and hospitable home
for present
and future generations.»

The Earth Pledge.

SECURING THE FUTURE

An Agenda for SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

"The Spirit of Rio must create a new pattern of behaviour.
It is not enough for us to love our neighbours
We must also learn to love our world and the natural environment, which we are continuously destroying.
Beyond the moral contract with God and the social contract with man, it is essential to conclude a political and ethical contract with nature – with this Earth to which we owe our existence and which gives us sustenance."

Boutros Boutros-Ghali,
Secretary-General, United Nations.

"The road to the Earth Summit truly constituted a high point in the history of the United Nations and the world community. All of us who shared that great experience now share the responsibility for ensuring that the road from the Summit is indeed the road to a more sustainable, secure and equitable future for the entire human family."

Maurice Strong,
Secretary-General, UNCED.

Historic Summit

"Humanity stands at a defining moment in history."
Preamble to Agenda 21.

History was made in several ways at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) – the Earth Summit – in Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June, 1992. Not only was it the biggest ever UN conference at Summit level, it also tackled the largest tapestry of fundamental issues critical to our survival on this planet: our common home that transcends and outlives all our conflicts.

The Summit brought together more than 100 Heads of State and ministers or other top officials from 172 governments, as well as several thousand members of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and more than 8,000 media representatives.

It made history particularly for people in developing countries. For the first time a consensus was reached at the highest level of governments to adopt a radically new-people centred approach to fighting poverty and raising living standards: an approach that creates a global partnership for sustainable development by bringing together governments, inter-governmental organisations, NGOs, public and private institutions, and interested citizens.

The consensus consecrated recognition by the Heads of State that poverty alleviation must go hand in hand with environmental protection and sustainable development.

The carrying capacity of the earth and the caring capacity of its people were inter-twined to spearhead ***Agenda 21:*** the most far-reaching practical measures for human development ever agreed upon by governments. This contains 115 targeted programme areas and clearly specifies priority actions, driving forces and the essential means at all levels of endeavour - local, national, regional and international.

Agenda 21 is underpinned by the ***Rio Declaration***, a set of principles outlining the rights and responsibilities of States in achieving sustainable development.

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Global Partnership

The Summit indisputably demonstrated that international co-operation works. Its success was a tribute from the Heads of State to all those who made common cause and continue to work together in a global partnership to achieve sustainable development.

Such disparate bodies as national governments, intergovernmental groups, agencies of the UN system, NGOs and other interested parties came into partnership to inject fresh meaning and purpose to environment and development.

> *"To meet the challenges of environment and development, States decided to establish a new global partnership. This partnership commits all States to engage in a continuous and constructive dialogue, inspired by the need to achieve a more efficient and equitable world economy. It is recognised that, for the success of this new partnership, it is important to overcome confrontation and to foster a climate of genuine co-operation and solidarity. It is equally important to strengthen national and international policies and multinational co-operation to adapt to the new realities."*
>
> *Agenda 21*

Despite the high-level government participation, the Summit was not a lofty enterprise remote from the people. Its accessibility was underscored by the over 1400 accredited NGOs – the largest number at any official UN conference.

Public awareness of UNCED's themes was further underlined by the more than 29,000 people including over 9,000 NGOs from 171 countries who attended the '92 Global Forum, an independent series of events, seminars, lectures and exhibits on environment and development issues, held alongside the Summit.

The seeds of partnership and readiness to take action were already visible in the process that led up to the Summit. In the preceding 18 months, Governments sent more than 170 national reports to the Geneva-based UNCED secretariat and thousands of NGO and media representatives kept in regular touch with it.

Focus on Developing Countries

Developing countries have moved to centre-stage. Recognising their special needs, the world's highest leaders and its most skilled organisations have promised to provide technical and financial support for each nation's efforts to build the capacities needed to achieve sustainable development.

Development without limits or stop-and-go jerks may now be possible, because it would be based on actions that husband resources, improve human creativity and attack debilitating poverty at its roots. Such development is likely to be truly sustainable for it will not over-stretch a country's capacities, nor will it deplete the natural environment which nurtures both the economy and life on earth.

> *"We are confronted with a perpetuation of disparities between and within nations, a worsening of poverty, hunger, ill-health and illiteracy, and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystems on which we depend for our well-being.*
>
> *"Integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to the fulfilment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems, and a safer and more prosperous future.*
>
> *"No nation can achieve this on its own; but together we can-- in a global partnership for sustainable development."*
>
> *Preamble to Agenda 21.*

Never before have world leaders so forcefully declared that environmental protection and sustainable development are two sides of the same coin requiring inter-connected solutions. Indeed, they have agreed to combat the many different problems involved through steps taken simultaneously at all levels as part of integrated long-term strategies.

The primacy given to integrated policies and inter-connected measures is a major step forward in international thinking on development, capacity building and poverty alleviation.

Summit Achievements

The Summit's most important achievement was the recognition that environmental protection and economic development require global solutions cutting across national frontiers, economic or social systems, and ideologies.

Another key achievement was agreement that such worldwide problems can be handled only through appropriate and effective networking of solutions, the means chosen and the people involved in implementation.

The world leaders saw environment and development issues as a lattice-work of inter-dependent problems that must be resolved through global partnership and co-ordination. They recognised that environmental concerns must be integrated into every stage of actions to promote economic development.

"How does one evaluate an event like the Earth Summit without using phrases like 'unprecedented', 'historic', 'largest ever'? It is not an easy task because UNCED was all of these things. The Summit has to be seen not just in terms of substance, but also as a process. To have demonstrated that an open, transparent and universal process can achieve results and can open new pathways to solve long-standing and seemingly intractable problems is perhaps its most significant outcome."

Nitin Desai, Deputy Secretary-General, UNCED.

The Summit not only made sustainable development a household concept around the world but also accepted that it is fair and equitable for all countries to share the burdens of environmental protection.

Industrialised countries recognised their greater responsibility for global clean-up and prevention than poorer ones and pledged to provide additional funding to help developing countries to get a head-start on the road to sustainable development.

Above all, the Summit recognised that the environmental and human costs of inaction could outweigh by far the financial costs of sustainable development. For the first time, the entire world community pledged to reinforce harmony between nature and human activity through measures emphasising entrepreneurship, human freedoms, market liberalisation and the participation of all sections of society, including women, youth and non-governmental organisations.

Summit Outcomes

New Agreements

■ The *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development:* a series of principles defining the rights and responsibilities of States in the area of sustainable development.

■ *Agenda 21:* a comprehensive blueprint for global action in all areas of sustainable development.

■ *Forest Principles:* a statement of principles for the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests worldwide to be applied voluntarily by governments.

New Conventions

Two legally binding conventions negotiated earlier in other forums were opened for signature at Rio and signed by over 150 countries during the Summit:

● The *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change:* aimed at stabilising atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases at levels that will prevent human activities from interfering dangerously with the global climate system.

● The *Convention on Biological Diversity:* aimed at obtaining effective international action to ensure the conservation of genes, species and ecosystems – the earth's living wealth; to promote their sustainable use and to ensure the equitable sharing of benefits arising from them.

New Recommendations

The Summit recommended that the UN General Assembly should:

▲ Set up a *United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development* to supervise the translation of Agenda 21 into concrete actions and to review the flow of finance for the Agenda. It asked that the Commission should hold its first meeting in 1993.

▲ Establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee to draft an *international convention to combat desertification* to be completed by June 1994.

Under a new approach to ocean management including proactive regimes to avoid conflict and prevent environmental damage, the Summit also recommended:

▲ Convening *international conferences* on conservation and management of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks, consistent with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

▲ Convening a global conference on sustainable development of small island developing States to be held in 1993.

▲ Convening a global conference to exchange experience in the field of ocean management which could be held before 1994.

New Steps
Transition to Sustainable Development

The Summit took the first significant steps towards transition to sustainable development through four inter-linked elements:

❍ Agreement on the actions contained in Agenda 21.

❍ Political commitment at the highest level to implement those actions.

❍ New open and transparent processes allowing for communication and co-operation between official and non-official organisations working towards developmental and environmental goals.

❍ An enormous increase in public awareness of the issues involved.

The Rio Declaration

"Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature."

The Rio Declaration.

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development puts people above all other concerns. It embodies several specific decisions reached for the first time at such a high level and on such a global scale. These include decisions to:

- Establish poverty alleviation and full participation by all sections of the population, especially women, youth and children, as the chief guiding principles for global economic decisions.

- Enshrine the sovereign right of each country to exploit its own resources in ways that do not cause environmental damage beyond its borders.

- Apply the principle of generational equity: that there should be equity between the rights and needs of the current generation and those of generations yet to come. The present generation cannot wantonly expropriate our earthly habitat. It has a duty towards future generations to pursue sustainable development so that the planet might remain capable of sustaining those yet to come.

- Observe differentiated degrees of responsibility among countries for environmental protection and sustainable development, although these are the common responsibilities of the world community. Thus countries that pollute more have accepted that they should do more and pay more for environmental protection and sustainable development than others.

- Bring recognition of the transboundary liability principle, under which a country is held liable for environmental damage outside its borders caused by a polluter based on its territory.

- Emphasise that countries should take into account the approach that the polluter should, in principle, bear the cost of pollution.

- Insist that lack of conclusive scientific evidence should not be a reason for postponing urgent measures to prevent environmental degradation.

Agenda 21

Agenda 21 is a broad-based set of actions covering developmental and environmental issues in an integrated manner. It includes concrete measures and incentives to reduce negative environmental impacts and to revitalise economic development.

Though far-reaching, innovative and multi-faceted, it is simple at its core for it has just one overwhelming concern: people. It is one of the most directly people-oriented programmes of action ever agreed internationally.

Equity is the unifying thread running through its 40 chapters. Its main achievement is that it has managed to obtain global consensus around the largest-ever body of specific actions to promote equity in the relationships of humanity with nature, the rich and powerful with the deprived and weak, and the present generation with future generations.

Distinguishing Features

As an action programme, Agenda 21 distinguishes itself from all past processes in several significant ways:

- Its most innovative feature is that it purposefully integrates disparate environmental and developmental problems into a common set of solutions.

- Its real strength is that it is buttressed by a global consensus. It embodies the earnest commitment of all participants to really go beyond words to concrete actions as soon as possible.

- Above all, Agenda 21 offers flexibility and avoids duplication of work being done in other forums. Co-ordination and co-operation are built into its design from the start.

Concepts and International Dimensions

Agenda 21 is built around simple core concepts, notably: *combating poverty, restraining wasteful consumption patterns, and tackling demographic pressures.* These direct the strategic thrust of the specific programmes and actions that it recommends.

In a fresh approach, it breaks away from tradition to place simultaneous and equal emphasis both on giving poor people

more access to vital resources and on the sustainable management of those resources.

"Agenda 21's successful implementation is first and foremost the responsibility of Governments. National strategies, plans, policies and processes are crucial in achieving this. International co-operation should support and supplement such national efforts. In this context, the United Nations system has a key role to play."

Preamble to Agenda 21

Its starting point is the realisation that the transition to sustainable development cannot be made without a supportive international climate. Such key issues as the flow of resources out of developing countries, adverse terms of trade, restricted market access and others, must be addressed simultaneously.

To serve sustainable development, the international economy must:

- promote trade liberalisation;
- make trade and environment mutually supportive;
- provide adequate financial resources to developing countries;
- encourage conducive macro-economic policies.

Programme Contents

Agenda 21 is a tapestry of inter-dependent activities which covers almost every field of human economic and social endeavour.

Its core programmes concern poverty, consumption and demography. People-centred programmes include ambitious ones on human settlements, health and education. Resource-centred programmes include combating land degradation and desertification; forest conservation; biodiversity management, conservation and the sustainable use of its components; water resource development; oceans management and atmospheric protection. Economic sector programmes include agriculture, industry, energy, and toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes.

Other programmes focus on fragile ecosystems in deserts and drought-prone areas, mountain areas, coastal areas and small

islands. Industry-oriented programmes focus on environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes, including prevention of illegal international traffic in those materials. A major effort is proposed on bio-technology covering both promotion and use as well as bio-safety and risk management, since these are not handled by any international instrument.

Cross-sectoral programmes include measures for the development and transfer of environmentally sound technology, the invention and dissemination of cleaner production processes and waste minimisation, and capacity building measures such as improved access to information on sustainable development needs, strengthening scientific capabilities, and generating financial resources for environment and development.

The programmes on the atmosphere and biodiversity aim to provide support for the separate global conventions on these subjects.

Agenda 21: Main Themes

Some of the substantive themes running through Agenda 21 programmes are:

Reforming Policies

Agenda 21's most important contribution is its insistence on integrating environmental imperatives into every stage of local, national and international decision-making on social and economic development questions. It provides a clearly defined framework for the integration of environment into the economy. It delineates the priority actions, the driving forces and the essential means for defining such integrated sustainable development policies and achieving economic goals without exacting a price from either environmental or developmental needs.

The Agenda suggests several micro and macro-economic tools for policy reforms and calls for environmental considerations to be built into the policy-making framework from the start, rather than being added at the end. It especially emphasises the needs for sound macroeconomic policies, fostering entrepreneurship and removing sources of distortions in investments and trade.

The Agenda also calls for domestic policy reforms to correct misdirected public spending, large budget deficits, obstacles to new enterprise start-ups and distorted foreign exchange and interest rates. In turn, the world's key economic powers are called upon to bring about a stable and predictable international economic environment.

Alleviating Poverty

Agenda 21 identifies poverty as a global problem, requiring global solutions. People, not resources or production, should be the starting point of an effective strategy for sustainable development. Alleviating poverty requires genuine global partnership between recipients and donors. Benefits will accrue to the world as a whole, not just to the poorest people.

The chief thrust is towards integration of anti-poverty and resource-management programmes at the local level. So, for instance, rangeland management programmes would include measures to raise the productivity and incomes of herdsmen, desert control programmes of nomads, etc.

Controlling Wasteful Consumption

Agenda 21 pinpoints the wasteful consumption patterns associated with industrialisation and wealth as the most serious current causes of global degradation of the environment. The modern industrial economy has led to unprecedented use of energy and raw materials and unprecedented generation of wastes. This is exacerbated by wasteful and inefficient consumption patterns world-wide.

The Agenda recommends a fundamental transition to strategies which encourage a move away from lifestyles that produce such wasteful consumption and production patterns.
This is one of the most challenging issues for sustainable development because the consumption patterns are deeply rooted in the values and lifestyles that have emerged in industrial societies and are often emulated throughout the world.

Focusing on the Population

Agenda 21 recommends total spending of about $7 billion a year, including half from external sources, on population activities between 1993 and the year 2000.

Population, consumption and technology are the major driving forces of environmental change. World population is expected to reach 8 billion by the year 2020, up from about 5 billion currently. Combined with industrial pollution and wasteful consumption, this growth will place increasingly severe stress on the earth's life-supporting capacities.

So, there is urgent need for policies and programmes to bring human numbers and consumption patterns into balance with nature's capacity, while developing technologies to enhance that capacity through careful management of natural resources. Special emphasis needs to be put on the role of women and the protection and enhancement of their rights.

Encouraging Participation

One of Agenda 21's most innovative thrusts its insistence that sustainable development means little without involvement at every stage of people from all sections of society and broad public participation in decision-making.

The specific context of environment and development has highlighted the need for new forms of participation. Individuals

groups and organisations not only need to know what is happening, but also to be allowed to take part in the decision-making and implementation processes, particularly for actions directly affecting their localities, lives and work.

Among other things, the Agenda contains blueprints for global action for women, children and youth, indigenous peoples, workers, farmers, the business and scientific communities, trade unions, and local authorities. It places particular importance on the involvement of non-governmental organisations. Regular national reports are encouraged reviewing changes in the areas of environment and development.

Building Capacity

The greatest need is for an innovative approach to international co-operation, including new methods of technical assistance for countries attempting to acquire the domestic capacities needed for sustainable development.

A country's ability to follow sustainable development paths is determined to a large extent by the capacity of its people and institutions, and by its ecological and geographic conditions. Capacity building encompasses the country's human, scientific, technological, organisational, institutional and resource capabilities. It is essential for individual countries to identify priorities and determine the means for building capacities for sustainable development.

Agenda 21 takes a two pronged approach. First, a careful assessment by each country of the gaps in its capacities; and secondly, integration by donors of their financial and other support within the context of the country's own actions. The aim is to make technical and financial assistance one component of a larger and co-ordinated set of national measures.

Improving Technologies

Agenda 21 emphasises two lines of action: greater use of environmentally sound technologies, and more transfers of those technologies at affordable terms to developing countries. Environmentally sound technologies are process and product technologies that generate low or no waste. They are not just individual technologies, but total systems including know how, procedures, goods and services, equipment, and organisational and managerial techniques.

Expanding Scientific Capabilities

Agenda 21 places central importance on scientific research and efforts to strengthen the scientific capacities of developing countries. The key to sound decision-making lies in scientific expertise in identifying, studying and evaluating current conditions and future prospects for environmental change. But the lack of full scientific evidence should not be an excuse to postpone actions that are justified in their own right.

One critical requirement is for scientists to provide a more accurate estimate of the earth's carrying capacity and its resilience under the many stresses placed upon it by human activities.

Integrating Trade and Environment

Agenda 21 recommends that governments should try to make environment and trade mutually supportive. They should work towards an international trade system which encourages productivity and competitiveness, and promotes a constructive role for industry in dealing with environment and development issues.

Trade can adversely affect the environment if it leads to overuse of resources or wasteful consumption patterns. Equally, environmental concerns can hamper trade if they are unjustifiably used as technical barriers.

Agenda 21 recognises that an open trading system is of benefit to all trading partners. If an environmental problem's roots do not lie in trade, attempting to correct it through trade measures is not efficient. Nor should unilateral trade actions be taken on environmental grounds.

Emphasis should also be placed on market-oriented practices and moves towards commodity prices that more accurately reflect environmental and resource costs.

Financial Resources

Most funding for Agenda 21 will come from each country's own public and private sectors. In addition, most industrialised countries reaffirmed their commitments to reach the accepted UN target of 0.7% of gross national product (GNP) for official development assistance (ODA) by the year 2000.

Governments also agreed to seek durable solutions to the debt problems of low- and middle-income developing countries. The Summit recommended that developing countries should be given more say in the $1.3 billion Global Environment Facility (GEF), which is likely to remain the major funding mechanism for global environmental problems.

The UNCED Secretariat estimated that $125 billion in grants and loans would be needed every year by developing countries to implement Agenda 21 proposals. This is $70 billion more than the current level of ODA.

At the end of the Summit, UNCED Secretary-General Maurice Strong said that governments had pledged to provide about $6 to $8 billion in additional funds for sustainable development programmes.

Forest Principles

A global consensus on forests was reached at the Summit for the first time in the form of a statement of principles for the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests. The key principles are:

- Special efforts should be made by all countries, and particularly developed countries, to green the world through reforestation and forest conservation.
- All aspects of environmental protection and social and economic development as they relate to forests and forest land should be integrated and comprehensive.
- Each country has a sovereign right to develop and use forests according to its needs on the basis of national policies for sustainable development.
- Developing countries that establish forest conservation programmes should receive specific financial resources to stimulate other economic activities.
- Environmentally sound technologies should be transferred, if necessary at concessional terms, to promote sustainable forest management in developing countries.
- Trade in forest products should be based on international trade rules and unilateral measures to restrict or ban trade should be avoided.

"Important decisions must be taken by governments and the UN to ensure that the promise and real potential for change generated by UNCED will be fullfilled. This cannot be taken for granted; it will not happen automatically. It will require continuing, unrelenting efforts to maintain and build on the political will that made possible the agreements reached in Rio."

Maurice Strong,
Secretary-General, UNCED.

United Nations Conference
on Environment and Development
160, route de Florissant
1231 Conches
Geneva (Switzerland)

Telephone: 41-22-789-1676
Fax 41-22-789-3556

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